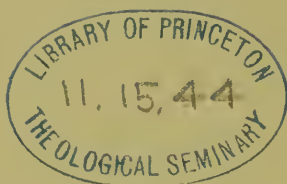


Allen E. Beenan

Historical Discourse
on the Occasion of the
50th anniversary of Christ
Church Parish
Unionville, Conn.

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HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

ON THE
OCCASION
OF THE

50TH ANNIVERSARY

OF

CHRIST CHURCH PARISH

UNIONVILLE, CONN.

JUNE 17, 1896

BY

The Rev. ALLEN E. BEEMAN

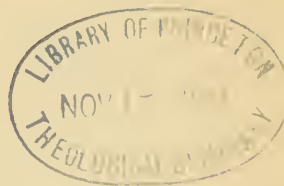
HARTFORD, CONN.

Press of The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company

1896

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HISTORICAL DISCOURSE.

FIFTY years is a long time in the life of any community, and especially in so busy a one as this. The Tunxis River with its fine water-power early attracted the notice of manufacturers, and paper, iron, and kindred industries found here a fitting field for their development. And in the coming and going of families and individuals — so marked a characteristic of our American life — there would inevitably occur here in this place the ebb and flow of various religious preferences, and the stability of none. All the religious bodies of New England doubtless then had representatives in Unionville long before the year 1845 : the year when the organized life of the church we love began. But the Standing Order was that builded on the Saybrook platform, and in accordance with that formula, the Congregational meeting-house was the common home of all Christian people in the village. The day has gone by when it would be either correct or courteous to deny that the Gospel was preached to men in that church, or that Christian morality and sanctified lives could be lived under teachings somewhat at variance with the lessons of history and the traditions of truth. But with all these blessings — and you know I would not minimize them in the very smallest jot or tittle — there were individuals here who were restless and homeless when deprived of the ministrations of that church, whose sublime ritual had been the loved friend of their youth. From various climes and widely-sundered states they found themselves worshiping together in unfamiliar scenes and uncongenial surroundings. What wonder, if like Judah at Babylon, they now and then came together, and their familiar talk ran on the beauties of that fair

temple and the songs of Zion that the hills about this valley shut so far away from them. The traditions of this town nowhere hint at any unpleasantness with their brethren of a different faith; but where diversities of custom and alien modes of thought touch man in the depths of his being, as they do in whatever comes between him and his God, here ultimate separation is sure to arise. The occasional ministrations of a clergyman from some neighboring coign of vantage, some happy parish priest, preserved to these scattered sheep the rites of their church. So at length haply some one suggested that the church people of Unionville take steps to organize a parish—the unit which might give “a local habitation and a name” to their distracted minds and wandering footsteps. Of course it would be impossible for one in the position of him who now addresses you to state that a belief in, and veneration for, the church of many ages, the church of Paul, and Chrysostom, and Augustine, just as much as the same church under Cranmer and Laud and Benson,—appealed to the convictions and guided the faith of your fathers here 50 years ago. Perhaps the wave of emotion that stirred England in the ten years after 1833, and sped in ever-widening circles round the world, had not dropped all its impetus ere it fell on our New England shore; for while the year 1845 lost Newman to England’s church, that same year witnessed the baptism with the Name of the Holy Trinity of what had till then been Washington College; and may we not to-day say that this same year added another to the stars of that stellar sea whose combined brilliance make up the Diocese of Connecticut? Surely, speaking before friends and on this our holiday, we may thus felicitate ourselves. And while dwelling on the causes of the formation of a separate religious body here, perhaps it is not amiss to speak of a dimly traditional story that the Episcopalian attendants on the solitary Divine services that were then held

here objected to directing their adoration during the singing of the hymns towards the choir in the rear of the edifice, and to the awkward rencontre thus necessitated between the Hymn-Book of Orthodoxy and the Anthems of Prelacy.

But be this as it may, the parish of Christ Church, Unionville, was organized in the year A.D. 1845. And in sketching briefly its history, it falls naturally into two periods of 25 years each. Services began to be held here with ever-increasing regularity, now in the house of some faithful member of the infant church; for some time in the basement of the Congregational meeting-house; and at length in the upper room of a building where Tryon's Hall now stands. Hartford and New Britain were then, as now, the centers of missionary work in this county. The young church soon began to call on the clergy of these cities for occasional services. And their request met a ready response. First, there rises before us the saintly Dr. Payne, long since gone to his rest after a long pastorate in that foster-mother of patriots and theologians—St. George's church, Schenectady. Under his vigorous, though only temporary supervision, this young church put on its characteristics of independence and hard work that have abided with it to this day.

Again, men saw the Ritual of our Mother take on new meaning and grandeur as read in the reverent accents of one of America's greatest masters of vocal expression. Of the people here, and this little congregation in particular, Dr. Russell is wont to speak with admiration as one of the six churches which were under his pastoral supervision. Verily, he made St. Marks, New Britain, a pattern of charity as it allowed its pastor thus to absent himself on visits to his little diocese. It is devoutly hoped that nothing may prevent this old friend from being with us to-day.

And then there came here one to whom the city of Hartford owes a debt of gratitude that can never be

canceled. It was my privilege to minister for a time to some of those people whose whole Christian life had been moulded by the Reverend Father Fisher, as they loved to call him. The generation of labor that he gave ungrudgingly to the halt, the maimed, the blind, aye, and the sinful and the lost, has made real that proud epitaph of the builder of St. Paul's Cathedral, "*Si monumentum quaeris, circumspice*"; for those words are written in the hearts of men and women living around the little St. Paul's church in the very center of Hartford. Mr. Fisher came here frequently, and some of those yet in middle life speak with the same enthusiasm of his visits here, that marked his own peculiar people in the city. To his resolute counsels doubtless the parish owes the stimulus that led to the erection of this church. You can imagine the magnitude of the undertaking in such a community as this. With slender means, but robust faith, the enterprise developed. And as men already saw in imagination the fair towers and pinnacles rising from this conspicuous meeting of the ways, they looked about for one to lead them. And as they did so the first period of the parish life passes swiftly into the second twenty-five, whose completion we to-day accentuate. In 1869, there came here as rector a man singularly well-adapted by nature and temperament to act as a pioneer and builder in the larger life now opening before the parish. And may the baleful cloud that now overshadows that vigorous and untiring personality be speedily rent asunder, and the clear light of reason once again inhabit her wonted abode! Edward R. Brown believed in work; and his well-directed energies speedily gave point to the aspirations of his flock, and so the corner-stone of this beautiful Gothic edifice was laid with appropriate ceremonial on Thursday, the 29th day of June, A. D. 1871. An auspicious natal day! for the spirit of the Fisherman is yet visible in the fiery zeal and abounding love that have since characterized

those who worship here ; seeming to give — let us say it reverently — a new meaning to this corner-stone then laid, “Upon this rock I do build My church.” The zeal and spiritual life of the parish rose and spread till over-leaping village barriers it carried the healing waters of salvation on the north to Collinsville ; and to the southward dared to flow unabashed near a spot where the eagle-eyed Bushnell watched over the heritage left by Thomas Hooker in the First Ecclesiastical Society of Farmington. In both these towns zealous missions were founded by Mr. Brown ; that at Collinsville is now a flourishing parish ; and the little band at Farmington has been self-supporting from the start. All honor is due this gallant soldier of the cross and the group of laymen with him ! And it was as a reward to their faith that the Missionary Society voted for one year to Christ church, Unionville, the sum of \$400 — at that time a generous gift — with the agreement that this sum should be lessened \$100 a year till it was repaid. This was punctually done. A condition was made that from that day the parish was to take care of itself ; and that obligation was faithfully observed through more than twenty years until an unexampled panic, in 1893, compelled a request for temporary help. Mr. Brown remained as rector from 1869 until October 13, 1878. More important than the building of the church was the tone the rector gave to the religious life of the congregation. The doctrines of the church were taught in their entirety. An outsider might have thought that when a parish was organized amid such surroundings as prevailed here, there would have been some toning down of disagreeable, not to say hated, doctrines, in order that the wavering incomers might be propitiated, and the way into the church made easier. But such was not the case with Mr. Brown. His training and convictions correctly led him to hide nothing of the truth ; and the history of this parish has justified his course. The ritual he used to

begin with was the one which it commonly takes other parishes years to reach. And with this care for decency and order in the externals of worship, there was no lowering nor relaxing of energy in the spiritual work of this indefatigable man. At no time before or since has this parish been so thoroughly at one with its pastor; for no door was ever passed by in the unceasing round of his footsteps, nor the abode of sickness or trouble left to bear its burden alone. His superabundant sympathy, manifested to those without as well as within his church, won many to worship where such a man was, and so he led to this building numbers who have since called it their home. To the parish the sundering of this pastoral relation was a severe blow. The church welcomed to the rectorship in October, 1878, a scholarly and able man—the Reverend William Lusk. Under his wise leadership the parish prospered, till after some fifteen months' pastorate, North Haven was fortunate enough to obtain his services, and Mr. Lusk has since made that town his home. He who now addresses you came as lay-reader in February, 1880, and served as deacon and priest till April 6, 1885. Harmonious and pleasant were the relations of pastor and people during these years wherein the callow divinity student learned the difference between the theology of theory and the theology of practice. He still thinks he could have learned it under no more agreeable auspices, nor found anywhere more indulgent critics. Among the first things done was the raising of money to pay off the small indebtedness still remaining on the church, in order that it might be consecrated. This was done, so that on the 12th day of August, 1880, Christ church, Unionville, was duly consecrated and set apart from "all unhallowed and worldly uses" by the present bishop of the diocese. During these five years, too, the grounds about the building were carefully graded and a substantial granite retaining wall was built around the church premises. This was accomplished through

the untiring efforts of the ladies' society — named here "The Church Workers." Some \$850 paid for these improvements, and since then all debt has been avoided. Through the skillful engineering of Mr. C. L. Mason, the town of Farmington, in town meeting, kindly voted to the church the land on the south side between the church's property and the cemetery wall, and so made possible the handsome grounds the parish now holds. To Mr. Mason is, also, due the graceful sweep of the churchyard and its symmetrical grading. This work was completed in the summer of 1881.

The Reverend Richard Searing came as rector early in 1886, and remained with this parish until December, 1889. Under his capable administration the life of the church was much quickened, and especially was his power felt in the Sunday-school. In some respects this parish has had peculiar difficulties in keeping its hold on the young. The needs of higher education and training for mercantile life has called elsewhere more than the usual proportion of children. And then, except occasional visits to this town, the demands of their life-work keep them away: and so the church perforce loses strength by this continual outflow. Our consolation is that other churches gain by our loss. But none the less we scan the ever-fluctuating muster-roll with perennial hope that the course of our American life may in this respect change, and the children be enabled to live in the home of their fathers.

The Reverend F. B. Whitcome became rector in June, 1890, and remained till the same month of 1891. This period saw the beginning of the financial troubles of the nation that culminated in the panic of 1893; and the industries that had hitherto flourished here felt, as soon as any, the distress of the commercial pulse. The great iron trade that has brought so much prosperity to the United States and to this town with the rest, found that there was scant profit in carrying iron ore from the West

to New England and then re-shipping the finished product back to the West again. This phenomenon has caused a re-adjustment of wages paid to many a household, and where all are so busy as they are here, any lowering of income hurts. But the church life still flowed smoothly on, and this year passed as did the others.

G. W. Griffeth filled the pastorate next, coming in August, 1891, and remaining until May, 1893. The upheaval in the industrial world at this time was a direct cause of work inaugurated on new and untried lines by Mr. Griffeth; and doubtless his aim was to guide the church life so that it might appeal to minds here that had grown lukewarm toward religion, and wished the church to wrestle with the problems of modern society to a greater extent than her charter permits. Time has proved the wisdom or the crudeness of such schemes; and while the impracticable has passed away, the good has assimilated with older and well-seasoned modes of work, and no unpleasantness has marred the Christian spirit of the congregation.

In the regular rectorships there now comes a break from May, 1893, to July, 1895. But the destinies of the parish were entrusted on each Sunday to no untried hands. The Rev. Dr. S. J. Horton brought to the weekly teaching of the people something that the Church here had long lacked. With signal ability and unction he uttered the stored wisdom of well-nigh four-score years of study and meditation; and while no mere "*Laudator temporis acti*," he still recalled to the restless spirit of our age the settled moral convictions and high Christian standard that have made our American civilization what it is to-day. Laboring under the weight of many years and with his life-work so nearly over, he gave his best efforts to his duties here for the space of two years. And within the week just passed you have been called to stand by his grave-side where his body awaits the final summons. Fisher, Payne, and Horton — these three names

bridge the half-century of your parish life; and they alone of those who have ministered here have passed beyond the veil.

In July, 1895, the Reverend Wolcott W. Ellsworth began his rectorship here, and of his unwearied zeal and conspicuous success you yourselves can take note better than can I. As to the statistics of the Church, let me say in passing, that there have been 376 baptisms, 49 marriages, 133 burials, and 245 confirmations since the parish registers have been kept here. Doubtless the occasional acts of the various clergy who visited Unionville are set down in their own Church records.

Having, for the better marking of the years of parish life, set down the list of clergy and their rectorships, let us turn to look at some of those laymen and faithful women who "have borne the burden and heat of the day." In the presence of one whose residence here has nearly spanned the half-century which we to-day commemorate, it is not fitting that I should do more than bear witness to the unfailing courtesy, unswerving fidelity to his rector, and faithfulness to the best interests of the parish of him who has been for thirty years Senior Warden of this Church. One of the movers for the establishment of Christ Church, Unionville, he brought to the fortunes of the infant congregation the prestige of an unsullied business honor and the needed experience of a man of affairs. It is one of the privileges of this day that he can be here to witness this assemblage. Of him who was so long also a warden of this Church, but has a short time ago gone to his rest, every event of the past forty years speaks to you. Phineas Bird Goodwin, in addition to all else that he did for this parish, made possible the erection of this church edifice; for his word guaranteed the Missionary Society that their loan should be repaid. The memory of his honest, kindly face and innate gentlemanly ways, bespeaking one of "nature's noblemen," will ever abide here, and his unswerving

generosity, so long continued and so heartily given, testifies to the steadfastness of his faith. "Verily, he being dead, yet speaketh." And then there was Mrs. Andrus—who took the rector aside one day near the close of her life and gave a closely-guarded piece of gold that it might be built into this wall that girds the church. It was indeed a "widow's mite." Time would fail me should I speak of Norman Mills, and Daniel Goodwin, and Mrs. Bird Goodwin, and Mrs. Carlos Mason, and of her who was the wife of your rector when this church was built. Many a home was made glad by her winning charity, her sympathy with all who suffered. I know that in a sketch like this some names must be omitted, but the scroll on which is written in characters of light their long-continued faithfulness is not yet full, and it would ill-become me to attempt to read to you what is therein set down. Few parishes, I believe, have made so small change in the vestrymen in so long a span of years as this of yours. Fifteen and twenty-five years have seen the same names on that board. A history this of half a century of which you have cause to be proud. With more than the average of prosperity, with no internal divisions, with no indebtedness to blunt the edge of your endeavor, to-day you should thank God and take courage. And not the least of the compliments I have heard about this Church was made by a Bishop of Connecticut, "Unionville is one of my parishes that never makes me any trouble."

So, with the past secure, you await the future with confidence and hope. You have secured a fine lot for a rectory, and soon, I doubt not, your aspirations will be gratified and a home for your rector will complete the roll of your good deeds. And may the prosperity of the parish increase ever more and more till we all gather for eternity at the Jubilee of the Lamb of God in our heavenly home.

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